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ABSTRACT

The primary characteristics of steady state is that it lessens the flexibility of an institution to respond to the demands of change. The phenomenon of steady state will not appear suddenly on campuses throughout the country in the late 1970's and early 1980's when the number of high school graduates diminishes. It is a gradual process influenced by local circumstances, and it hampers the very activities that might enable an institution to overcome steady state by appealing to learners. The Oshkosh University calendar plan attempts to deal with the steady-state crisis by providing the campus with new flexibility. (Author/KE)

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The Oshkosh Calendar Plan: Resolving the Steady-State Dilemma

American Association of State Colleges and Universities

THE OSHKOSH CALENDAR PLAN:

RESOLVING THE STEADY STATE DILEMMA

American Association of State Colleges

and Universities

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FOREWORD

The phenomenon of steady state will not appear suddenly on campuses throughout the country in the late 1970's and early 1980 when the number of high school graduates diminishes. It is a gradual process influenced by local circumstances. For some campuses the process has begun and the term "steady state" has become a euphemism for "less": less of everything--students, budget, faculty, even public support. When this situation becomes endemic to American colleges and universities in the next one and one-half decades, the experiences of institutions which have coped with steady state may be useful to others wishing to avoid or minimize its effects. Successful strategies may be identified for further refinement and adaption; at the very least, failures can be analyzed so that they need not be replicated during the years ahead.

Robert Birnbaum

Chancellor
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

INTRODUCTION

The primary characteristic of steady state is that it lessens the flexibility of an institution to respond to the demands of change. Colleges and universities find it difficult, if not impossible, to initiate new academic programs, to expand learning experiences, to find opportunities for faculty development, and other dynamic activities which serve new learning needs. Steady state hampers the very activities which might enable an institution to overcome steady state by appealing to learners.

The University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, beginning in summer, 1975, will attempt to counter the stifling effects of steady state by increasing alternatives through adoption of a new calendar. Although the program has been developed under the rubric of "calendar reform," it encompasses many important elements relating to institutional functioning, ranging from faculty workload and contract provisions to curriculum innovation, faculty development and student flexibility. The main focus of the new calendar is upon the use of time. Time is usually overlooked in considering the resources of an institution, but, in fact, the manipulation of this variable can have potent effects upon the educational process. In the calendar, time is used in three ways: to support faculty development, to increase student programming flexibility, and to encourage curriculum innovation. Unlike many non-traditional calendars, it does not substitute one set of temporal limitations for another; but rather imbeds a radical approach to the use of time within a traditional semester, permitting both to function simultaneously. The calendar retains a 17-week semester, but breaks it into modules which can be used to plan courses varying in length from three to 14 weeks.

The alternative calendar is constructed upon existing unique institutional strengths for the purposes of defining a distinct character which will attract students and faculty, serving as a structural focus for dynamic change, and meeting the needs of new learners. The calendar thus serves as a response to the problems of enrollment declines, projected not only in the institution, but throughout the entire University of Wisconsin system.

As the college pool decreases, competition for students will become even more intense than at present. A distinctive, coherent and identifiable character is important in such a climate because it separates an insti-

"...enrollments could be stabilized over the long term of ten or fifteen years only by increasing access for new learners: housewives, working adults, retired persons..."

tution from its competitors. It also presents to external constituencies, as well as internal constituencies, a well-defined institutional mission which in turn serves to focus the goals and activities of participants. Additionally, it builds a stronger consensus regarding necessary based budget reallocation, and defines institutional strategies not only for survival, but for development. A distinct character can mean the difference between a healthy institution acting continuously and analytically to solve serious problems, and one feverishly caught up in decision-making by crisis.

The distinctiveness which can provide a focus for institutional goals and priorities, as well as attract students in a buyer's market, must be built into the organizational structure. Colleges and universities are notorious for their resistance to change. The ability to institutionalize innovation through restructuring was seen as essential to sustaining a program that at least initially would run counter to institutional traditions and norms. The new calendar provided the structural focus by significantly altering temporal sequences which influence faculty assignments, teaching methods and student flow through the system. The administrative organization was then revised as a consequence of these changes to reflect the needs of the new calendar.

The third point, the needs of new learners, is related to both demographic trends and educational philosophy. Declining birth rates and the recent decrease in percentage of high school graduates enrolling in college made it probable that enrollments could be stabilized over the long term of ten or fifteen years only by increasing access for new learners: housewives, working adults, retired persons and others for whom educational opportunities traditionally have not been available. Accessibility for such persons must include dimensions other than geography. A potential student can live next door to a college and yet not have access to it because of admissions standards, prerequisites, program limitations, or scheduling conflicts. Courses which require attendance at three classes a week over a seventeen-week period, during the middle of the day, generally do not serve the needs of the adult learner. Neither do they serve the needs of the younger so-called traditional students who for personal or economic reasons must move in and out of course work more frequently than is possible in a traditional semester system. Any new calendar should operate to permit students to register and study at times more convenient to their individual needs if the interests of adults, or any part-time learners, are to be served properly.

BACKGROUND

In 1971, UWO began operating under budgetary and enrollment constraints that, if continued, threatened to destroy its ability to function as a university. During that time, attempts to circumvent the financial exigency through the most oft-suggested methods proved ineffective or inappropriate. The retrenchment was in and of itself disruptive; contrasted with the expectations of the years prior to 1971, it was an ordeal.

The development of UWO is representative of most colleges and universities. It shares with hundreds of its sister institutions a one hundred-year progression from normal school to teachers college, state college, and, finally, to state university. By 1970, UWO had become

"The budgetary restraints enabled UWO to assess early the effectiveness of the procedures currently being proposed as alternatives...the impact was too little too late."

the third largest campus in the extensive University of Wisconsin system. Its policies and programs were established during a period of continued growth and served the university during a decade that saw its enrollment grow over 300 percent: from 2,842 in 1961 to 11,817 in 1970.

The university projected significant future enrollment increases and interpreted ambiguous signals from a statewide coordinating body as encouraging its development into the third major doctoral institution, which, together with the Madison and Milwaukee campuses, would be the principal agents for advanced and professional study in the state of Wisconsin.

By 1971, a series of events had begun which clearly would render the expectations unrealistic. Increased competition from vocational institutes, new public two-year colleges, and even a new public four-year institution in close proximity resulted in a reduction of UWO's share of the college freshman pool. This reduction was exacerbated further by declining college attendance rates among high school graduates.

The effects were disastrous. Between 1970 and 1974 full time equivalent enrollment declined 15 percent and an enrollment-driven budget formula decreased operating funds by the same percentage during that period. The university utilized its budgetary flexibility to base-reallocate among various programs, and managed to take the smallest proportion of the cut out of instructional areas by draconian measures in other areas. Still, the number of faculty positions declined by 10 percent during that period, and in the spring of 1974, 22 tenured faculty were placed on layoff status.

The budgetary restraints enabled UWO to assess early the effectiveness of the procedures currently being proposed as alternatives to the retrenchment of the steady state crisis. It tried many of them, but the impact was, in the long run, too little and too late.

For example, institutions now are warned to study carefully departmental tenured faculty in the face of enrollment declines. This is sound advice for many reasons, but its effectiveness as a specific deterrent depends upon many factors. For example, in some disciplines, such as English, faculty size is determined more by freshmen enrollment than by total enrollment. In 1970 UWO had an English faculty of 63, of whom half were tenured. In 1974 the department had to be reduced to 43 faculty, all of whom were tenured. When enrollment declined still further, only tenured faculty were left to absorb the crunch, and eight were placed on layoff status. No one could call a tenure density of 50 percent too high. The problem was not caused basically by expanding the tenure pool, but rather by decreasing the departmental base. There is obviously a limit to the flexibility any department can build in to avoid this kind of problem.

The university also has promoted early retirement as an option to senior faculty. However, as is now being recognized, this is a one-time and generally ineffective solution. Because a majority of the faculty was hired in the past 10 years, institutions such as UWO typically have a young faculty with very few close enough to retirement to have any major impact. At best, a program of early retirement can be viewed only as a minor delaying strategy rather than a solution.

UWO participated in a program of faculty relocation leaves (trading one year of salary for professional development purposes for a letter

"The experiences of UWO indicate that the institution desiring to counter the debilitating effects of the steady state environment must look beyond minor manipulations of personnel policy..."

of resignation), faculty reassignment leaves, and the most troublesome of all, faculty retraining leaves. The latter were for the purpose of permitting tenured faculty in overstaffed departments to return to graduate school for a year with full salary to prepare themselves for reassignment to a related department. A total of eight tenured persons were reassigned and put into retraining programs. It was humane, it saved additional positions and avoided a further violation of principles of tenure. It also uncovered many problems, some of which have not been discussed fully or appreciated by proponents of such programs.

Faculty retraining involves bringing people into a new department who are not fully credentialed, when a surplus of fully qualified candidates usually exists. Students understand the potential impact of such an action upon the quality of their educational program amd provide a powerful political deterrent to its extensive use. Tensions also are created within the department and questions can arise as to why these faculty should be accepted when they hold their tenure from another department. Does the assignment of a retrained tenured faculty member into a department lower the chances for a young, fully credentialed and effective teacher to achieve tenure in that same department? These and related questions probably will keep the potential for retraining to meet steady state needs to a minimum.

The experiences of UWO indicate that the institution desiring to counter the debilitating effects of the steady state environment must look beyond minor manipulations of personnel policy for a long-term solution. It must come to grips with an examination of its total program and services and assess the degree to which they will remain attractive during a period of increased competition for a declining pool of students. Institutions which meet the needs of their constituencies in distinctive ways will be more likely to escape the destructive effects of diminishing enrollments amd resources than those which continue old policies in a new era.

PLANNING STEPS

As UWO evaluated its present situation and considered its future, certain unique strengths and experiences emerged as possible bases for a new approach to its programs. First, the institution was located in a small city in the middle of a major population center, thus establishing both a minimum level of traditional enrollments based on demographic factors, and assuring a pool of potential part-time adult learners within easy commuting distance.

Second, the institution had amassed significant experience in self-paced instruction over a three-year period. By the spring of 1975, over 150 credits of auto-tutorial, self-paced curriculum existed in two separate programs which enrolled over 20 percent of the students. One program, called 4-M, offered traditional courses in self-paced format and served as a curriculum development laboratory for the college of letters and science. The other, called General Studies, begun in 1974, offered sequences of computer-monitored, one credit, self-paced, interdisciplinary courses which could be taken separately by any student or grouped in certain ways to satisfy university general education requirements. Recognizing the potential of this instructional resource, the university experimented in 1974 with a system of continuous registration to permit students to enroll in a self-paced course at any time during the semester.

"...the university was able to identify and resolve almost all of the major problems which accompany a change of this magnitude in a period of seven months."

Not all faculty supported the 4-H or General Studies programs, or the concept of continuous registration. But the experimentation with and the implementation of these programs was testimony to the presence of a significant cadre of creative and able persons who could develop time-free and, to a lesser extent, space-free curriculum components. This was, of course, an important element for a flexible calendar system.

The third factor which influenced the development of a new calendar was the recent history of the institution. Enrollment decline and budgetary reduction had been constant and severe. The layoff of tenured faculty was a traumatic event climaxing several years of anxiety and crisis. A new university administration appointed subsequent to these events with the expectation that change would occur found it much easier to accomplish than would have been the case had the campus been stable and the faculty secure.

The institution therefore was predisposed by the events of retrenchment to favorably consider any reasonable alternative to past practice which gave promise of relief.

The discussion of the proposed program was done in a manner that: attempted to share fully all information on past and projected university problems; identified the charactersitics of the program in enough detail so that everyone was aware of the major elements; and, encouraged opinions at all times and through all levels in the developmental stages. To create an atmosphere for open and constructive discussion the administration published a series of thirteen "calendar papers," each from one to 30 pages in length, dealing with a specific aspect of calendar reform, which were mailed to all faculty. In addition, administrators met individually with over 40 different departments in meetings of two hours or more to share information and accept feedback. Meetings also were held with the student newspaper. When the concept, initially broached to faculty in August, 1974, was presented to a faculty referendum in October, 1974, almost 90 percent of the faculty voted, and 66 percent were in favor of the new program. It also carried the endorsement of the Faculty Senate, the Oshkosh Student Association, and the student newspaper.

Just as its review and eventual approval involved large numbers of campus participants, its implementation was managed to inform and utilize persons from the entire institution. A Calendar Coordinating Council was formed to coordinate the new program, with 12 faculty-student-administrative committees. Each committee dealt with a separate aspect of the new calendar, such as academic policies, curriculum, registration, faculty responsibilities and evaluation. Their recommendations went to appropriate faculty, student or administrative groups before final review by the chancellor. The council was set up as a "kleenex committee" which would be discarded once its primary function was served. As a result of their activities, the university was able to identify and resolve almost all of the major problems which accompany a change of this magnitude in a period of seven months.

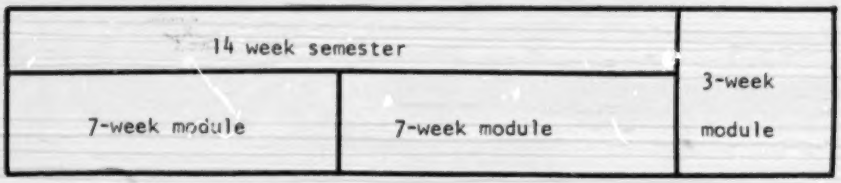
"The calendar combines a traditional semester system with elements of the 4-1-4 and the Colorado College modular approach."

DESIGN AND OPERATION

The Oshkosh Calendar Plan was developed to meet in a distinctive way the needs of present and projected university constituencies.

The calendar combines a traditional semester system with elements of the 4-1-4 and the Colorado College modular approach. Two main semesters are offered, each 14-weeks in length, each containing two seven-week modules. Additionally, each 14-week semester is followed by a three-week module. A summer semester of eight weeks includes two modules, each four weeks in length. Courses may be offered intensively over a three-week module, less intensively over seven weeks, or in a more traditional 14-week semester. Faculty may be assigned to teach in any module, but the total time on campus and the total number of courses taught remains the same as under the traditional calendar. Included in the program is a system of continuous registration which permits students to enroll and complete courses at various times throughout the year.

Traditional 17-week Semester



REVISED OSHKOSH CALENDAR

Faculty have agreed to teach additional courses (an activity which traditionally takes place in summer school) for a reduced rate of added salary so that the savings can be used to support a program of faculty development on a year-round basis.

The new calendar provides the university with the flexibility to:

.permit a traditional calendar of two 14-week semesters to operate without inhibiting the operation of supplementary alternative calendar imbedded within it
.offer courses of three, four, seven or 14 weeks in length
.provide mutiple entrance and exit points for students to facilitate stop-out opportunities and increase options for the part-time learner and adults
.assign faculty to teach during various terms, including the summer, to increase productivity
.permit faculty to concentrate their teaching load so that blocks of free time are established for research, curriculum development and similar activities
.permit faculty to plan five-month periods of non-university activity in one year by teaching more intensively in another
.establish an in-service "faculty college" during two three-week terms each year in which faculty will offer courses to their colleagues, either discipline-based or dealing with new approaches to educational techniques
.provide additional compensation to faculty for meritorious projects performed outside their contractual employment periods.

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STUDENT FLEXIBILITY

"Even for existing students a calendar with multiple entry and exit points to permit time out when needed... may make the difference between stopping out and dropping out."

It is ironic that as enrollment at this and other institutions declines, the number of adults interested in and ready for a collegiate educational experience is increasing. By referring to these individuals as non-traditional learners, higher education has managed to place the onus on the student instead of on the universities, which generally have not chosen to adjust their traditional programs to meet the unique needs of adults. For the institution willing to adjust its procedures to suit student requirements rather than administrative ease, there is a large market of potential students waiting to be served.

As adults, these individuals have time commitments to family or vocation which under present circumstances may preclude their participation in higher education. Few such persons can commit themselves to a 17-week college course, and many who can do so find the present calendar requirements difficult if not impossible to meet.

For such persons, the alternative of 14-, seven-, four- and three-week courses multiplies the opportunities for enrollment. Educational opportunity is further enhanced by continuous registration which enables students to register in self-paced courses or additional smaller modules as the semester progresses. Even for existing students a calendar with multiple entry and exit points to permit time out when needed for work or other personal responsibilities may make the difference between stopping out and dropping out.

The careful and planned development of courses within the modular calendar will lead to opportunities for students to plan unique academic schedules. Student scheduling may follow the pattern of the more traditional semester. For example, a student may reduce the course load during the 14-week semester by taking four three-credit courses, and pick up three more credits by taking one course in the three-week term. Conversely, a student may overload by taking six three-credit courses each running 14 weeks, and a three-credit course during the three-week term. This alternative, available to the most capable students, would permit a student to earn a baccalaureate degree in less than three years by attending two summer sessions.

Students may depart more radically from the traditional semester pattern by combining the more intensive modules. For example, a full load of 15 credits may be earned in a semester with a student never carrying more than two courses at one time: two three-credit courses during the first seven-week term and the second seven-week term, and one three-credit course in the three-week term. By combining courses offered over 14 weeks with more intensive seven-week courses, self-contained modules of longer courses, three-week courses, and opportunities for registering in self-paced auto-tutorial courses at any time during the semester, students can put together programs which vary their workload in many ways to meet their own personal needs and learning styles. In a similar manner, vacation times can be flexibly arranged to meet personal requirements for work, leisure, or family obligations.

Initially it was thought that scheduling options on the traditional pattern would predominate, and modular course scheduling would increase slowly. The faculty was encouraged, not required, to develop seven- and three-week courses, and students, obviously, were not familiar with utilizing modular course options. However, it became evident early in the summer that interest in and need for the program was even greater than anticipated. As of June, 1975, 400 seven-week courses and over 130 three-week courses were planned for the 1975-76 fall semester in

addition to the 1500 14-week courses. Furthermore, student preregistration indicates that more three-week courses will be needed, and the results of a first evaluation project showed two-thirds of the students supporting the new calendar as superior to the old one.

"...faculty may select sequences of time which best meet the needs of the course material, rather than forcing each and every course into an identical time-frame."

There are at least three learning advantages offered by the 7-7-3 calendar. First, students will be able to concentrate on fewer subjects at one time. Many students currently carrying five or six courses each semester are not able to focus attention sufficiently to minimize learning. They must "fire-fight" courses as each makes demands. The new calendar allows students to concentrate on fewer courses for shorter periods while still completing the same number of credits over a semester. Second, students who are unsuccessful in a particular course will be able to repeat it sooner, thereby hastening their return to good standing--an important factor in lessening attrition. Third, highly motivated students can complete the baccalaureate degree in three years, or both the baccalaureate and masters degrees in four.

CURRICULUM CHANGE

The new calendar increases the flexibility necessary for curriculum change and development. To begin with, faculty may select sequences of time which best meet the needs of the course material, rather than forcing each and every course into an identical time-frame. Furthermore, by breaking the lockstep schedule of the traditional semester, blocks of time can be opened to faculty for planning curriculum development. For example, the three-week period at the end of a term may be used to revise or develop course content. Reducing the teaching load during a 14-week period will permit a faculty member to develop a new, intensive three-week course and offer it almost immediately.

The calendar will permit faculty members to arrange their schedules to make teaching in interdisciplinary courses much more common than it has been. Departments can utilize the three-week term at the end of the semester to explore new possibilities for case study, independent study or intensive review courses for students who want the added experience or who need to improve skills.

The calendar will encourage variable credit courses in which students can enroll for less or more than the standard credit in an elective; one-credit courses designed to stand alone, to serve as one-credit modules within interdisciplinary combinations, or to serve as introductory modules to be followed by one or more credits of independent study. Departments may group three or more courses offered intensively during the 14-week or two seven-week terms and offer an integrator course during the three-week term, possibly as an applied studies project.

The scheduling opportunities offered in the concentrated seven- and three-week terms can affect dramatically the development of "on location" learning experiences, including the possibility of transporting entire courses to sites appropriate to their content. It enhances opportunities for off-campus learning experiences, such as work-related internship, field studies, clinical internships and intercultural programs abroad or at home, which at present generally are available only during vacation periods or semester-long programs.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

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A faculty member fills many roles: teacher, advisor, scholar, and com-

"...constant and ever present demands of class, examination, preparation, grading and other responsibilities of the classroom effectively prevent the accumulation of that most precious academic commodity--time."

mittee member, among others. Traditionally, all roles are performed concurrently. The teaching schedule is the primary determinant of faculty time, and for many faculty, the demand of the classroom and laboratory effectively preclude their full participation in other activities. This is not only because the total amount of time available is so limited, but also because the present calendar does not pe mit intense and sole attention to any one of them for any substantial period of time. The constant and ever present demands of class, examinations, preparation, grading and other responsibilities of the classroom effectively prevent the accumulation of that most precious academic commodity--time.

The new calendar reorganizes the faculty load dimensions of the academic year to provide greater opportunities for course development, university governance responsibilities, research, and other professional activities. Faculty responsibilities remain the same as under the traditional calendar: an annual teaching load of 24 undergraduate credits (or its equivalent) and campus-based responsibilites, other than teaching, extending over 34 weeks. However, under the new calendar, the responsibilities can be distributed throughout the 34 weeks in a different manner and one which serves to fulfill the responsibilities effectively. Under the traditional calendar all classes were conducted for the full length of the 17-week semester, during which time a faculty member was also expected to engage in development, governance and research. Under the new calendar, the 17-week semester is broken into smaller time components which can be used by the faculty member to separate the time demands of governance, research and development from teaching. Because the longest course option available is 14 weeks rather than 17 weeks, many faculty will experience a slightly increased teaching load during this time period. However, for faculty teaching 12-credit loads within the 14 weeks, a three-week period at the end of each semester will be free of any teaching responsibilities. Of course, some faculty may choose to teach part of their load during the three-week term, and will have their load reduced proportionately during the 14-week period.

Faculty members who complete their teaching responsibilities in less than 34 weeks will be engaged in campus-based professional activities during additional periods to bring their total campus based activities to a Regent-mandated 34 weeks. During such periods, faculty members will be required to be accessible to students and colleagues, and engaged in professional activities related to the university governance curriculum development, and student counseling. Some faculty members will be required to teach during the summer semester as part of their workload, and will be able to take a seven-week module during the fall or spring semester as their vacation period.

If faculty workload is viewed over a two-year rather than a one-year period, the modular calendar makes it possible to teach more intensively during one portion of the biennium, and combine two years of vacation time in another to create a system of mini-sabbaticals.

Although under the calendar it is theoretically possible for each faculty member to arrange a schedule including a five-month period of vacation time every two years, in practice it is likely that the number of such opportunities will be somewhat limited during the first several years of the new calendar and expanded in future years based on experience in dealing with the new scheduling procedures.

The implementation of faculty development programs will become increasingly urgent as growth comes to an end, faculty mobility diminishes and departments and colleges become heavily overtenured. The new

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calendar reallocates time in a manner which will encourage activities contributing to maintaining and enhancing teaching effectiveness. It also goes beyond this to provide resources to support more extensive activities for professional renewal. Time for these activities exists under traditional calendars in summer vacation periods, but often is used for additional teaching for compensation rather than personal development. As a consequence of the flexibility in faculty assignment created by the new calendar, as well as the agreement by the faculty to accept lower salary levels for additional teaching, the university has been able to create a yearly fund of $200,000 for development purposes. Part of this fund will be used to support faculty research performed outside the regular contractual period. A portion will be allocated to each college to be used under university guidelines for supporting extensive efforts in curriculum development, institutional service, institutes, in-service programs and professional improvement activities. The balance of the fund will be used to support university wide and inter-college programs, one of which will be the establishment of a "faculty college" in which faculty will offer short courses to their colleagues.

POSTSCRIPT

The calendar plan is an attempt to deal with the steady state crisis. Whether it will provide an effective response to the need for curriculum reform without the luxury of extensive development funding, for faculty development during the era of limited growth and mobility, and for learning opportunities for a new generation of students remains to be seen. An evaluation program which is to be an integral part of the plan will attempt to provide at least provisional answers to some of these questions. The most direct answer will be given by students through changes in enrollment patterns, and by faculty in a referendum planned for 1977, two years after implementation, which will either support a continuation of the calendar or return the university to a more traditional use of time as a resource.

Community reaction has been uniformly positive, and faculty and administrators, while tired after one of the most demanding semesters the campus has been through, appear basically positive.

If the program is successful, dramatic changes should appear in student profiles, attendance patterns, and attitudes of all university groups during the course of the evaluation program. Should these changes occur, they will indicate the UW-Oshkosh has made significant progress in establishing itself as a "university of alternatives."